

A Biographical Tribute to Father

Roy Hallman

It is both my happy privilege and my fearsome task to tell you briefly some of the things I remember about my father. As many of you know, I am a musician and not one who prepares speeches or biographical sketches. Preparing choral music for a service honoring my father would be a joy, but, in spite of inexperience, I accept this assignment with the prayer in my heart that something of the radiance of his Christian life and the marvel of his accomplishments may shine through.

"Whoa!" Oliver Hallman gave his habitual but unnecessary order to the already motionless horses. No echoes resounded as the boys, Clifford and Willard, tested their lungs, for these were the fertile, unploughed plains of Western Canada, and as of this moment the Hallman family claimed as their homestead all that the eye could see. Oliver's wife, Zelinda, stepped down from the covered wagon with a sigh of relief, for the distance from Kitchener, Ontario, to this "section" of government-given land was, to the mile, the extent of her endurance.

Oliver was not an inexperienced farmer, and with the help of his two husky sons he soon had the "place" producing. After several years of bumper wheat crops and of reinvesting in bigger and better farm machinery and buildings, the weather cycle seemed to change. The rains became more and more infrequent, and to tilled soil came the moistureless penalty—dust. Without the natural ground-cover of prairie grass to hold the soil in place, the devastating winds made the province of Alberta a Canadian dust bowl.

It was during this difficult time that Willard decided to go to Calgary, the largest of the nearby cities, to seek whatever good fortune he could find. Soon he was an auto mechanic in a garage. He had not been in Calgary long when he read in the newspaper that a series of evangelistic meetings was to be held in the city. He went the first evening, and, for the first time witnessed an evangelistic song leader in action. Arthur McKee became Willard's inspiration.

The idea grew on him that he too could lead congregational singing. A few nights later he talked with Mr. McKee about evangelistic music as a profession and received strong encouragement. Not

all agreed with Arthur McKee, however. Zelinda, when she heard about it, said, "Ach, Willard! I have never heard of anyone making a living singing. Why don't you choose some substantial work such as farming, or perhaps even the ministry." Everyone he talked with discouraged him, hinting darkly that should he take up music as his exclusive occupation, he would most certainly starve. But the young man was not to be deterred. His mind was made up.

Shortly after his twenty-first birthday Willard was on his way to "the States" to attend Chicago Evangelistic Institute. During his several years at C.E.I. he found just the courses he needed.

He found, too, an extra-curricular activity that was matched by no previous happiness of his life. In those days a decree from the president of the Institute, Mrs. Iva D. Vennard, made "dating" almost impossible. In fact, so straight-laced were the school regulations that no one of the opposite sex could so much as speak a casual greeting in the halls. But love cannot be easily regulated. The intolerable restrictions merely aggravated the situation. Various plans were devised by concerned students, and soon Willard joined a gospel team. Of course, it was no coincidence that a lovely local beauty by the name of Ramona Hammer was the pianist. The two could hardly be blamed for talking while riding to and from church services. Willard's extra-curricular activity thrived.

The newly-weds—Mr. and Mrs. Willard Hallman—were indeed happy. After three years their joy was enhanced by a new addition to the family. At this time the Hallmans were living in Princeton, New Jersey. Soon Willard was seen knocking at apartment doors, proudly displaying his precious, and no doubt precocious, bundle of boy. Dr. John Finley Williamson and his wife joined with the students of Westminster Choir School in wishing the young couple well. Willard meantime was hard at work in Dr. Williamson's new school for choir directors. Part of the musical preparation in this now famous school included music theory, piano, choral conducting, voice, and various choral performances with major symphony orchestras, such as the New York Philharmonic and the Philadelphia Orchestras. That same year Willard was elected to the highest honor the School could afford. He was the Choir School's first student body president.

Some folks take weekend trips to the country for relaxation, but Willard and Ramona traveled each weekend to a large Methodist church fifty miles distant where they served as choir director and organist. Student positions of this kind sometimes spell the difference between financial ruin and solvency. But they are also a sort of internship or apprenticeship.

Upon graduation from Westminster Choir College, Willard and Ramona were asked by the same church to remain on a full-time basis. This they did, and during the next several years they had a full and rewarding ministry through music.

In course of time one day the postman delivered a letter to the Hallman home. It was from Dr. Clarence J. Pike, president of Cascade College, Portland, Oregon, inviting Willard to become head of the music department in that interdenominational liberal arts college.

Under the musical direction of Willard Hallman, Cascade College became a true pioneer in a cappella choir music on the West Coast. The traveling choir, which toured full length of the Coast, from Canada to Mexico, was among the first two or three touring a cappella choirs.

Willard and Ramona were co-workers with men of highest evangelistic stature. Among them were H. C. Morrison, C. W. Ruth, Paul S. Rees, J. C. McPheeters, Gipsy Smith, John Brasher, Oswald J. Smith, C. W. Troxel, D. Willia Caffray, J. G. Bringdale, L. A. Reed and E. Stanley Jones. Camp meetings from coast to coast kept their slates full for years in advance. Each summer during the three college-vacation months, Willard left the campus to contribute his exceptional skill to the work of the camp meetings.

After nearly fifteen years at Cascade College—years of vigorous musical growth and achievement, years of imparting spiritual values and a sense of direction to eager students—an emergency call came from the infant college of Willard's own denomination, the Mennonite Brethren in Christ Church. The leaders felt that his mature experience in the field of music, coupled with the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit in his life, was a combination desperately needed in the young and struggling school. In a few years the college was on its feet and growing steadily. Its music department could stand as an equal with that of other first-rate Christian colleges.

One day, through President J. C. McPheeters, there came an invitation to head the music program at Asbury Theological Seminary. There had always been a warm place in Willard's heart for Asbury College and Asbury Theological Seminary. Many of those with whom he had worked with evangelistically and educationally had had their roots in one or both of these institutions. God was leading, and in the fall of 1952, Willard and Ramona began a new and even more wonderful phase of their lives. Nearly fifteen years have passed since the Hallmans first became a part of Asbury Seminary. No one would question the significant part they have played in the spiritual, educational, and promotional work of the Seminary.

In those early days when he dreamed of evangelistic song leading, Willard never thought as far ahead as his seventieth birthday. It came on February 10, 1965, and now semi-retirement is near. Many are the lasting accomplishments of the years. Who would have guessed that the boy who tested his lungs on the frontier plains of Alberta would become head of the music department of Asbury Theological Seminary? The boy who dared to dream of music as a

profession—when such a thing in the vicinity of his boyhood was unheard of—followed the call of God, and in so doing has touched the lives of multitudes—perhaps even your life. I thank God that he touched mine.

God of our life, through all the circling years,
We trust in Thee;
In all the past, through all our hopes and fears,
Thy hand we see.
With each new day, when morning lifts the veil,
We own Thy mercies, Lord, which never fail.

God of the past, our times are in Thy hand,
With us abide.
Lead us by faith to hope's true Promised Land;
Be Thou our guide.
With Thee to bless, the darkness shines as light,
And faith's fair vision changes into sight.

God of the coming years, through paths unknown,
We follow Thee;
When we are strong, Lord, leave us not alone;
Our refuge be.
Be Thou for us in life our Daily Bread,
Our heart's true Home when all our years have sped.